

Never tell me the odds!

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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If you were offered the chance to play a point and click adventure game in which you could star as suave intergalactic smuggler, Han Solo, cruising the galaxy in the iconic Millennium Falcon, trawling the solar system on the trail of a quick buck, you'd leap at it at warp speed, right? No doubt in under twelve parsecs!

Well, that's kind of what Psygnosis's *Innocent Until Caught* amounts to, only minus the Millennium Falcon, absurd alien species, exhilarating action sequences and special effects. It's not *all* downhill though. *Innocent Until Caught* *does* feature an educational plot that revolves around income tax, just like *The Phantom Menace*. What could be more enticing than that?



We play as Jack T. Ladd (no, *really*), a thinly veiled parody of Harrison Ford... erm, sometimes known as Tracy. Not only in looks, smugly arrogant attitude and contempt towards authority, he also recites some of his best lines. If you want to establish his opinion on anything and everything, and have the patience of the Covallon, feel free to consult IUC's manual... all 32 pages of The Life and Times of Jack T. Ladd. But whatever you do, *don't* ask what the T stands for, it's a touchy subject.

Uh oh, if you've "got a bad feeling about this" you'd be on the right track. Psygnosis didn't *do* adventure games for a start, which is why they drafted in 'Divide by Zero' to take care of the development duties on their behalf. Actually Innocent Until Caught isn't too shabby at all, I just wanted to crowbar in that line because it's such a classic. Well, if it's good enough for Psygnosis it's open season on Star Wars worshipping.



Is that a customised Harley or a speeder bike in the foreground?

Incidentally, dividing by zero is technically a mathematical possibility, theoretically. Nevertheless, the explanation is about as enthralling as plodding through your annual tax return. Look it up if you've already lost the will to live and need that final shove over the edge!

Jack (a sort of space-travelling Del Boy who'll sell asteroids to astronauts, then evacuate the planet in a stolen spaceship before they can demand a refund) has been a very bad Ladd indeed in that he's not paid any income tax on his ill-gotten gains in six years so is in deep trouble with the Interstellar Revenue Decimation Service (IRDS). "The meanest, lowest, most despicable group of amino acids that dared coagulate in human form" according to our leading anti-hero. "They will tax anything that moves, and if doesn't move they'll slap an immobility tax on it".

To avoid being eviscerated, rather than Jabba the Hut, Jack must reimburse the IRDS within 28 days by any means necessary. Staying above the law is the *least* of his worries.

Corruption is rife within the bureaucratic 'Federation' who run the show in the (dystopian of course) future (chronodate 17104.24 or 2171 to earthlings). They're as bent as a nine bob note, so he's in good company. As long as the IRDS get their money they don't care where it comes from, or whose cold dead hands it has to be prised from. Consider it a microcosm for real-world politics, set in Ridley Scott's head. Hey, you know who *also* starred in Blade Runner?

Released from the interrogation chamber of the IRDS mothership having been tractor-beamed aboard against his will, alcoholic Jack heads for the nearest planet serving 'loopy juice' to commence his desperate, cash-scrounging survival mission. Number 5 is alive!





Initially exploring 'Tayte', typical adventure game rules apply; talk to everyone, pick up each and every - sometimes minuscule - object encountered and attempt to use them with one another... no matter how ridiculous the combination may seem at face value. How else would you come by a Bitehound-distracting, remote control ferret? Exactly.



IUC being a game initially developed in 1993 for DOS platforms and ported a year later to the Amiga, it incorporates optional dialogue branches, the outcome of

others' actions depending on your approach or attitude. Whilst the interface is bog-standard, employing verb icons to issue commands, it *does* include one novelty; a small window that alternately serves as a map or a magnifying glass for analysing the landscape. Shame about the uncomfortably jerky and slow movement of the mouse cursor (sometimes a naked dude carrying an arrow to protect his modesty, honestly).



Immediately you'll notice that while Divide by Zero borrowed Star Wars' Imperial Shuttle, one of the most prodigious leaders of the Rebel Alliance, and a kind of close approximation of some internal Death Star scenery, they chose *not* to adopt its 'universal' rating.



There's no nudity, swearing or vivid, gory violence to speak of. What makes it a bit risque for a game largely aimed at kids is all the lewd, sexist innuendo, prostitutes and seedy *yellow* light district.



*From the box blurb: "Keep your nose clean after 5
legspreader cocktails." - Can you spot a theme emerging
here?*

It's no wonder it had me checking to make sure I'd not booted up the wrong disks (all *ten* of them!). You'd expect this sort of Carry On from Les Manley or Leisure Suit Larry, not so much from a sci-fi soap opera.



Jack: Hi ... Hooker: No, but I can be if you want.

Following a Star Wars-style sweeping transition our assignment gets underway. Like Han Solo, Jack finds that the quickest way to earn some easy 'credits' is to run errands for people who possess more of them than him, which doesn't narrow down the number of potential candidates a great deal since he has exactly *zero* in his (puffer?) piggy bank having been pick-pocketed by the IRDS legalised crooks.



Still, depending on who you give the phaser gun deflector ring to, it's the pawnshop owner, Ebenezer, or mansion-

dwelling crime syndicate boss, Git Savage, who steps forward with a shopping list of obscure items for Jack to source; a Giant Kahoula bird egg from the zoo, a multi-million Quargian Pleno-credits bond 'liberated' from the CitiCitiBank Bank's vault, and a Stoneybridge Gallery art installation courtesy of Renato Spangle. If you can recover these objects they agree to split the profits 50-50.



It would be an extremely short game if this was enough to dig Jack out of his hole, paying off the IRDS with time to spare. So naturally, he's double-crossed, koshed over the head and delivered to the police station inside a giant birthday cake. Jack springs loose during the chief's birthday bash celebration, surrounded by his squad.



They were expecting someone far more female and crucially, *naked*, so you can expect them to be sorely disappointed at this orchestrated turn of events. Thus he's sentenced to 200 years imprisonment, for his plethora of criminal activities, *plus* insolence before his lordship, the judge.



Not the only time he'll find himself incarcerated as it happens, which at least is handy in *one* way. Every time we're apprehended Jack is stripped of his inventory, obliging us to start again with a fresh slate. Ironically this can be helpful since our stash quickly becomes cluttered and unmanageable due to its 'dump stuff anywhere' organisation system.



Jack doesn't spend long residing at her majesty's pleasure in Alkaseltz Prison before he's rescued by an enigmatic 'Samaritan' who inflicts upon him a 'helpful' sidekick known as Narm N'palm.



As his name would suggest he's a trigger-happy army-soldier-wannabe who applied, but didn't quite make the grade. Despite this rejection on account of being demented and dangerous, he wears the uniform and waves the appropriate weaponry. Believe it or not, he *does* actually have his uses beyond making the player feel like a Mensa grade genius.



Meanwhile, Jack learns that he's been busted free to embark on a world-saving assignment; to prevent the Grand LordMaster P'PauD'P'Pau (a manic despot hailing from the planet Shmul) from deploying the 'Transatron'. A supposed weapon of mass destruction designed to destroy the entire solar system, that is.

What is it with these ludicrous names anyway? Rattle off this one quickly and it sounds like a kid making finger-gun sound effects. There should really be a quick puff of air and a clunk at the end though to signify blowing smoke away from the gun barrel and then re-holstering the weapon. I suppose that would make his name P'PauD'P'Pau'Pfft'Clunk, which would be quite a mouthful to announce at public speaking events and whatnot. As you were.



In the process of promising to play matchmaker for a lovelorn nerd by the name of Eugene Cringe (the equivalent of Bond's pal, Q), Jack falls in love with P'PauD'P'Pau's daughter, Ruthless, himself.



The letter declaring said nerd's undying affection he climbed through her palace bedroom window to deliver is quickly

discarded, ripped into tiny pieces behind Jack's back and scattered on the floor while his adulating heart bulges in his chest. It's dismissed as 'junk mail' when Ruthie enquires.



Eugene is none the wiser so still agrees to help Jack to access the weapons lab; his end of the bargain in exchange for a meeting with his beloved Ruthie. That happens, sort of, though she looks suspiciously like Narm in a dress putting on a high-pitched voice. Can't imagine why.





Selfish, dishonourable and downright scummy, yet also one of the funniest scenes in the game, an incident relayed later through a not-quite-lie by omission. You know how audiences love these callbacks. It's a staple of stand-up comedy.

Leaving their love lives to simmer on the back-burner, Jack hops onboard a cruise liner to embark on the first leg of his journey towards the weapons research lab located in SkyCity to reclaim the fiscal super-weapon. Next stop planet Shmul.

Karma strikes! Jack is captured (once again), and this time stretched out on a rack ready to be tortured by the Big Cheese's chief inquisitor. Jack begins to confess all *without* being prompted, yet is abruptly hushed up because his captor wants to extract the information in the traditional manner for the sake of preserving his job satisfaction.



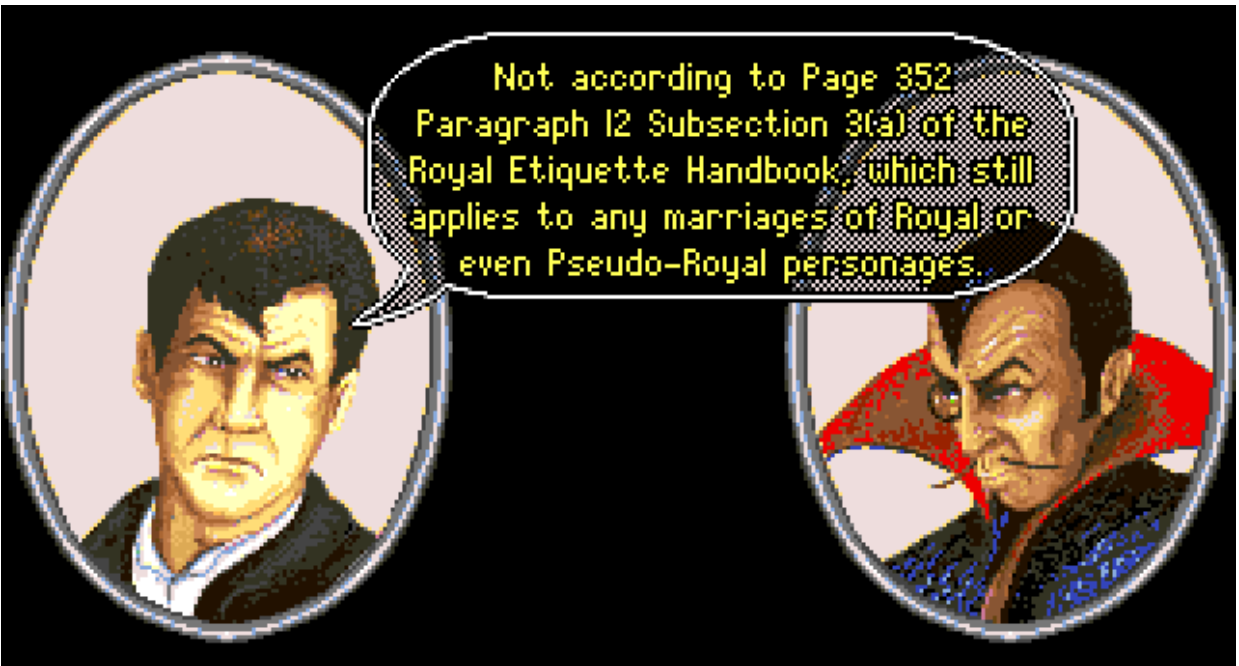
Astonishingly Narm somehow manages to woo Ruthie into giving the order to free Jack. She bursts in, Jack is immediately released from his restraints and suddenly we're back on course.

Now it's full speed ahead to the final destination located miles away on another continent. Narm, Jack and a dodgy travel warrant supplied by Ruthie stow away inside a cargo crate right before it's loaded onto a military shuttle.

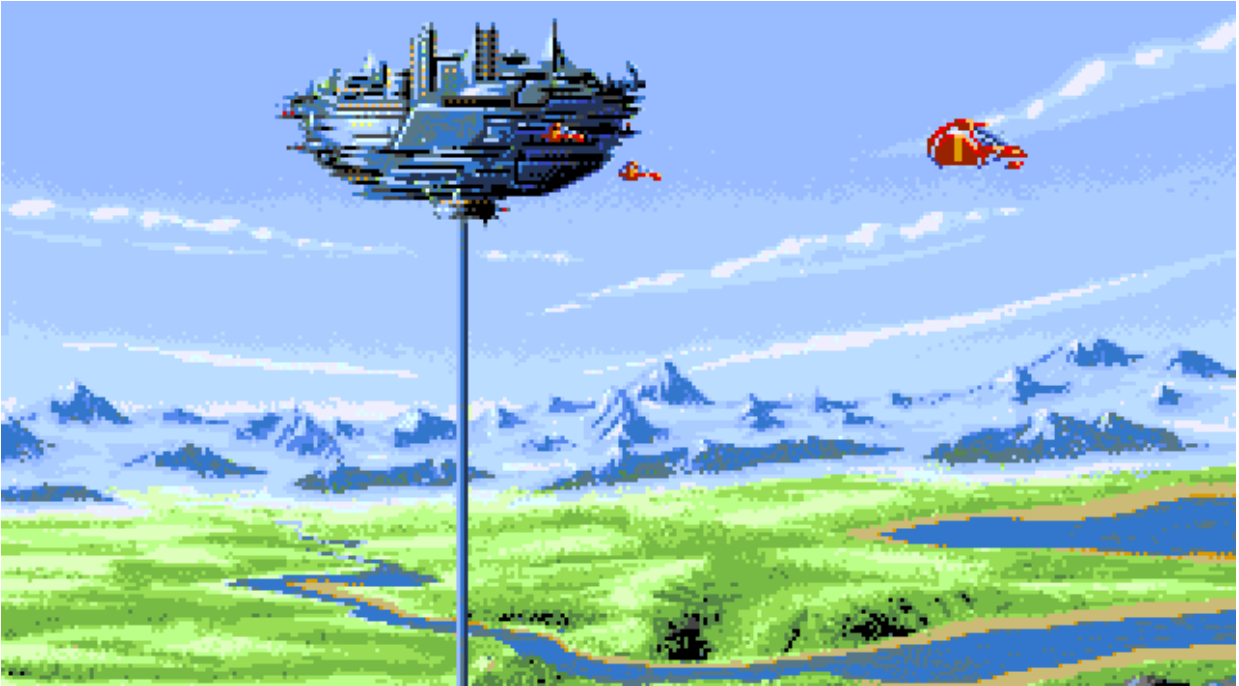
They arrive unscathed, then Narm has a brainwave; shoot their way out in a confined space! Likely now encumbered with permanent tinnitus they're at least free to stage a coup. Touching down on terra firma in an escape pod there's now nothing to stand in their way.



Erm, except maybe that evil megalomaniac chap who looks like a cross between Ming the Merciless and Dracula and rules the galaxy with an iron fist.



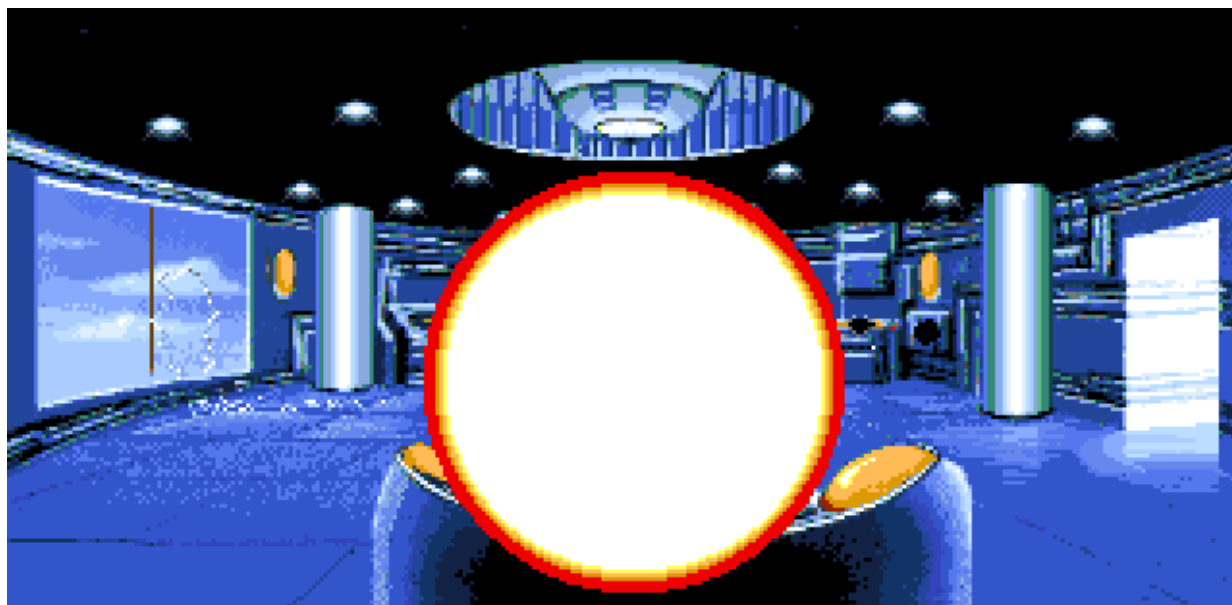
Upon reaching the top-heavy sky-grazer, however, they're forced to climb the million and one steps to the apex on foot seeing as the hamfisted walking disaster zone aka Narm has broken the passenger lift as well as the cargo lift. Despite never touching nuffink, honest gov'ner.



What feels like days later we finally arrive at the top to confront the chief villain. Ruthie is already there waiting, twiddling her thumbs. During the tropey 'baddie gives away all the secrets of his crazy world domination scheme' exposition scene we discover that Jack has been led up the garden path. The Transatron is, in fact, a purple jewel used to transfer debts and funds between citizens to unscrupulously reassign wealth or frame victims. And that's not the only shock revelation; Ruthless isn't ruthless at all. She's actually quite the humanitarian. *Full of Ruths* then. Hmm.

Oh yes, and moreover we learn that the crystal device is also being hotly pursued by the Federation, who intend to exploit its miraculous hacker-esque potential to wipe out evidence of several excessively lavish, exorbitant dinners. This would seem drastically at odds with their earlier claim that they plan to reverse engineer the crystal in order to devise an effective countermeasure. Somehow I suspect they were lying to manipulate us into doing their dirty work for them. Gasp! The scoundrels!

After a long betting standoff with P'PauD'P'Pau (in lieu of a face-hurty fistfight), the jewel is finally activated. Luckily, before it can do any serious damage Narm breaks in through the window like a black ops spy, shooting the crystal into oblivion.



"Uh, we had a slight weapons malfunction, but uh? everything's perfectly all right now. We're fine. We're all fine

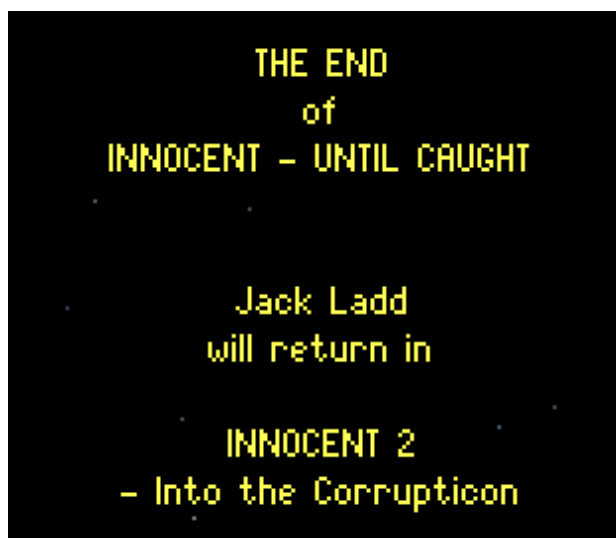
here now, thank you. How are you?"



SkyCity erupts in a shroud of smoke and voracious flames (if you use your imagination) as the trio of good guys escape just in the nick of time.



Jack and Ruthie make plans to marry, while the bloke with the daft name is MIA, although assumed to have survived the blast, which would explain how he could make a comeback for the DOS-based sequel released a year later. If you want to know what the cast would have sounded like had IUC been fully voice-acted, now's your chance; there's a text-oriented floppy disk version as well as an enhanced talky CD iteration. Innocent Take 2 features a character called Harrisienetta Fjord, a casino owner's secretary. I'm not making this up.

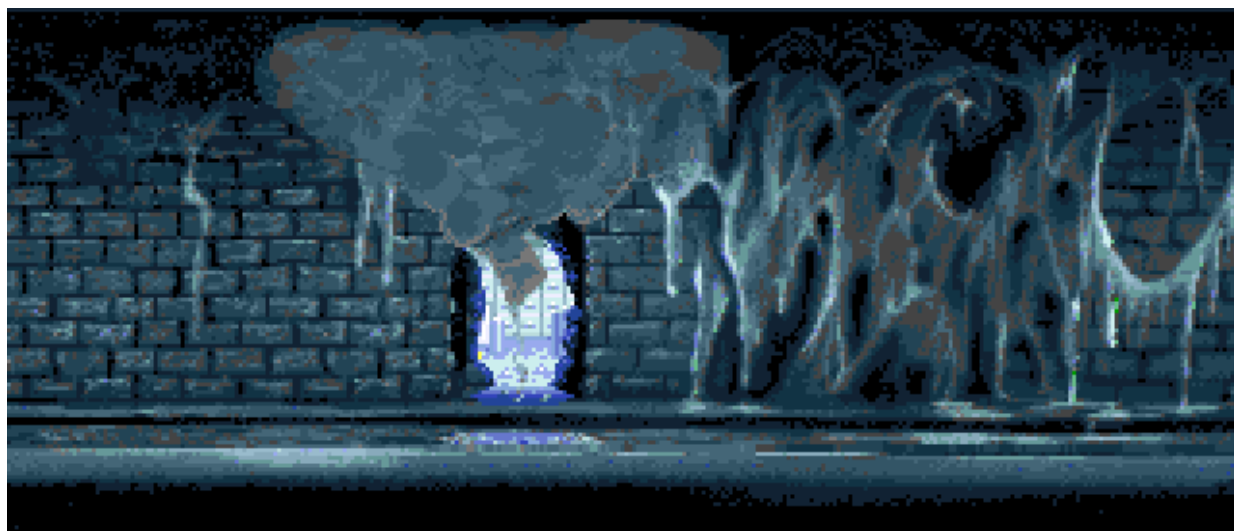


Not on the Amiga he won't, end credits lie.

As head-scratchingly infuriating as some of the puzzles are, it's reassuring to know that Jack can never die or get trapped in a no-win situation as with certain badly broken/poorly designed adventures I could name and shame. With this in mind, you're free to try everything and anything to make progress without stopping to consider the consequences or saving every 10 seconds.

Apparently, if you talk to the man with the kid holding a helium balloon he'll explain how a fly caught in a jar can be combined with a mushroom to blow up a bank vault wall, which just so happens to be accessible from within a sewer

tunnel. I didn't know this until it was too late to go back so I'm still clueless. I *did* get to burst the sproglet's balloon and steal the deflated remains to make him cry though. That really made my day.



It's a fairly long game (requiring an underground train to navigate), even when you know what you're doing. Nevertheless, if you keep plugging away you'll get there in the end without the need for any boring repetition/restarts.

Whether or not you'll be glad you persevered is another matter. For such a protracted slog *Innocent Until Caught*'s finale is pretty weak; run for your lives, boom!, the end. Doesn't that feel like a bit of a cop-out?

It depends if you've enjoyed the ride I suppose. Think of it as a journey, not a destination, and you'll savour some genuinely comical moments, illustrated with radiant pixel art and exquisitely rendered sequences. As long as you don't hang around in the same locations for too long you'll also get the opportunity to appreciate some excellent - albeit brief and incessantly looping - mood-enhancing audio.





Jack isn't the most endearing tour guide ever, yet if you picture him wearing a waistcoat/white shirt combo, striped trousers, high-boots and a holstered blaster with an overgrown shaggy rug standing beside him, it's a much more bearable proposition. It's all about planting the seeds, and letting the player fill in the blanks.

Few developers had the nerve to casually drop hookers into their games, peppering the script with near the knuckle references to sex and drugs. Even when some of the jokes feel crass and immature you have to at least give Divide by Zero and Psygnosis credit for gambling on controversy when it would have been so much easier to play it safe.



If you love their intergalactic rebel without a cause parody all the more for it, you can be sure he'd acknowledge the sentiment with, "I know". ;)